

**TOWN OF SALEM
BOARD OF FINANCE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2021 – 7:00 P.M.
VIRTUAL MEETING VIA ZOOM**

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PRESENT

William “Skip” Dickson, Chairman
Marshall Collins, Clerk
Corinne (Cory) Bourgeois
Deborah Cadwell
Janet Griggs
Matt Rucci
Kate Belleville, Alternate
John Bernier, Alternate
Maryann Casciano, Alternate

ABSENT

none

ALSO PRESENT

First Selectman Ed Chmielewski

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Dickson called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

RECOGNITION OF VISITORS:

Salem Volunteer Fire Company (SVFCO) Chief Chip Weston

SEAT ALTERNATE IF NEEDED: *none*

Chairman Dickson welcomed new Board Members Matt Rucci and Kate Belleville.

COMMUNICATIONS: *none*

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA: *none*

AGENDA:

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: OCTOBER 14, 2021 AND NOVEMBER 23, 2021 BOARD OF FINANCE MEETINGS

M/S/C: Collins/Cadwell, to approve the October 14, 2021 Board of Finance Regular Meeting Minutes. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

M/S/C: Griggs/Cadwell, to approve the November 23, 2021 Board of Finance Special Meeting Minutes, with the following amendments:

Page 1, Heading:

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2021 – ~~7:00~~ 6:00 P.M.

Communications:

2. Copy of a letter from Salem Democratic Town Committee Chairman Butcher, dated November 10 *and received November 23 at 4:47 p.m.*, recommending David Bingham to fill....

Page 2, Item 1, Public Comments:

In response, Clerk Collins stated that he received a statement from the Office of Legislative Research via ~~Democratic Town Committee Chairman Butcher~~ Board Member Bernier, which states.... According to the law, there was nothing unethical about the appointment of Alternate Board Member Bernier.

Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

2. **TREASURER'S REPORT**
 - A. **REVENUE SUMMARY**
 - B. **TRIAL BALANCE**
 - C. **FUND BALANCE**
 - D. **OTHER**

Chairman Dickson will request that Treasurer Pam Henry resume attending their monthly meetings to present the Treasurer's Report and answer any questions they might have.

Due to the inundation of documents, Board Member Rucci enquired as to whether the supporting materials might be housed in one accessible location. Board Member Griggs stated that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all of the supporting documents are required to be posted on the website and accessible to the public. Clerk Collins stated that he had requested that information be forwarded to the Board Members as they are received to allow the Board Members ample time to review the material. He commended the Finance Specialist in distributing the documents to the Board Members, especially those of which were received at the last minute.

3. **PUBLIC COMMENTS** – *none*

4. **SELECTMAN'S REPORT**

First Selectman Chmielewski thanked the Board Members for their service and commended Finance Specialist Lisa Jablonski for her hard work. He also thanked former First Selectman Kevin Lyden and the Town Hall staff for helping make his transition from Acting First Selectman to First Selectman a smooth and seamless one.

During their recent meeting, the Board of Selectmen appointed Selectman Lyden as the Acting First Selectman. They also appointed several candidates to the Economic Development Commission, Inland Wetlands & Conservation Commission, Emergency Preparedness Agency (aka Emergency Management Committee), and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Committee.

Emergency Services Director Mike Bednarz was appointed as the Emergency Management Manager to take the place of Donald Bourdeau, Jr., who recently retired from the position. The Emergency Preparedness Agency will be submitting their Capital and/or ARPA requests for technology equipment that will enhance the communication and the safety of the town.

He attended the Planning & Zoning Commission and Board of Education (BOE) meetings and Selectwoman Pam Munro, a retired educator and former member of the BOE, has been appointed as the Selectwoman Liaison to the BOE. The town recently received the final audit from King, King and Associates, which will be forwarded to the Board Members in the coming days. He looks forward to working closely with the Board and moving forward in the budget process. He commended and thanked the Board for all of their hard work and efforts.

Board Member Bourgeois requested a copy of the new Emergency Services Contract. First Selectman Chmielewski extended an invitation to meet with him to discuss the contract.

5. APPROVE 2022 MEETING CALENDAR

M/S/C: Collins/Bourgeois, to approve the 2022 Board of Finance Meeting Calendar.

Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

6. APPROVE 2022/23 BUDGET CALENDAR

Board Member Casciano recalled a discussion during which they agreed to meet with the Fire Companies, Ambulance, and Emergency Services on the same evening. Clerk Collins proposed moving the Gardner Lake Volunteer Fire Company and Ambulance from the February 24 meeting to the February 10 meeting.

M/S/C: Collins/Bourgeois, to approve the 2022/23 Board of Finance Budget Calendar, with the following amendment:

Move the below items from the February 24 to the February 10, 2022 meeting:

D) #220 Gardner Lake Fire Company

E) #230 Ambulance

Discussion: Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

7. SALEM VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY RE: REPAIR

SVFCO Chief Weston informed the Board that he will be out of state and will not be able to present the Fire Company's budget on February 10, 2022.

He reported that approximately \$2,200.00 remains of the \$21,000.00 that was budgeted for Line Item 5-222-618, SVFC Repair/Maintenance of Equipment, in their FY2021/22 budget. This week, \$1,055.00 was expended for an emergency repair on the Fire Company's Ladder Truck. In addition, a valve on the Ladder truck is in need of replacement. According to a new NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) Code, the valve must be replaced with an electric valve which is estimated to cost \$5,738.00. Furthermore, a single warning light on the Tanker Truck has ceased to work and, due to the age of the vehicle, are no longer readily available. Two estimates of \$9,100.00 and \$10,000.00 were received. Due to supply chain issues, the equipment would not be received for approximately two to three months. As a result of these unexpected costs, he will be requesting a line-item transfer(s) to help balance the department's budget.

In response to Board Member Bourgeois, he stated that he has submitted the replacement lights as both a Capital and maintenance item. Generally, Capital Items are expenditures that are over \$5,000.00 with an expected longevity of 5 or more years. Possible considerations included proactively replacing all of the lights or including the cost in the town's FY2022/23 budget. In response to Board Member Casciano, he stated that he believed the Tanker Truck is scheduled for replacement in the next two to three years. Clerk Collins proposed considering the item as a maintenance item until they begin further discussing the Capital Plan. SVFCO Chief Weston will investigate the possibility of locating (used) lights for the Tanker Truck, reducing the cost.

8. BOE/SCHOOL IT PLAN

Board Member Griggs provided a brief recap of the Board's agreement to hire an independent consultant to assess the school's IT Plan. Both the BOE and town have included the cost of the consultant in their Capital Plans and it was unclear to the BOE who would be hiring and funding the consultant's fees. Chairman Dickson recalled that the discussion came about as a way for the town to be able to plan the purchasing of technology equipment to avoid any emergency or bulk purchases. Board Member Griggs stated that an updated technology plan for purchases does exist and is available upon request. Chairman Dickson also recalled that BOE Chairman Sean Reith discussed the BOE initiating the process and presenting their findings to the Board, including any commonalities between the school and the town that could lead to potential cost savings. Clerk Collins agreed with Chairman Dickson's recollection, stating the importance of determining the technology needs of both the school and the town and the timeliness of the project as the town begins its discussions of the allocation of ARPA Funds and the possibility of expanding their broadband capabilities. Board Member Bernier further clarified that the context of the independent assessment was to hire a consultant, other than their current contractor, to conduct the assessment. Board Member Rucci agreed that with the availability of the ARPA Funds, conducting a town-wide, rather than a BOE/School, an assessment would be most beneficial. Clerk Collins suggested looking to the Towns of East Haddam and Old Saybrook and AT&T for any recommendations regarding broadband.

On a separate, but related note, she informed the Board that Microsoft will no longer be supporting Windows 10 in 2025 and Windows 11 will require hardware that most computers manufactured in 2016 and prior will not be able to support. She recommended a town-wide assessment of the Town Hall staff and Library computers. Clerk Collins suggested communicating with the Board of Selectmen to communicate with all of the departments to inform them of the possible need to upgrade their computers so that the Board can gauge its fiscal impact.

9. SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

A. BOE (Board Members Cadwell and Griggs)

Board Member Griggs reported the highlights of the BOE's December 9 Regular Meeting.

The BOE's IT services are currently divided between TB&G, which handles the hardware, network, and infrastructure, and LEARN, which handles the student data services; both of these services work in tandem. The Salem Youth Basketball League and Recreation Commission have donated a new scoreboard for the School gymnasium. The School is currently in the process of completing a school climate survey, which will include responses from the parents, teachers, and students.

The BOE currently has \$610,200.00 or 5.52% in unencumbered funds. Two (2) line-item transfers, totaling \$2,736.42, were recently made for new auditor fees and overtime office staffing. The status of the School's French teacher, from whose salary the line-item transfers were made, was unknown.

The oil tank replacement is near completion and they are awaiting the results of the soil samples. Three (3) bids for the Milestone Video Surveillance System expansion project were received and the project was awarded to Sonitrol Integrated Security Solutions, their current vendor and the lowest bidder. The selected vendor for the Gymnasium Sound System is no longer on the State bid list and the project may go out to bid.

The School is encountering issues receiving timely bids from vendors due to supply chain issues. Route 85 School traffic flashers have been added to their FY2022/23 Long-Range Capital Plan. The traffic flashers are estimated to cost approximately \$16,490.00.

The Teacher Contract Negotiations will be coming to a close today. If an agreement is not reached, the process will move to Mediation.

The BOE authorized the Superintendent and Business Manager to negotiate and enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Unions, requiring the staff to notify the administration of their intent to retire earlier in the school year. The second to the last sentence in her report was corrected to read that "A possible approach is to pay a fee (\$10-20) for each of the teacher's remaining ~~vacation day~~ *sick days* at the end of the year." She was unsure as to whether the sick days carry over from year to year. Currently, upon retirement, the retiree receives compensation for his/her remaining vacation days.

The School is reviewing the non-lapsing accounts for 11 (eleven) school districts to prepare for a presentation to the Board of Finance. A non-lapsing account would allow the BOE to deposit their unexpended funds into a non-lapsing account at the end of the fiscal year.

Board Member Griggs continued to review the BOE Staffing Presentation which reflects the reduction of overall student population and increases in the staffing and expenses for special education students due to the implementation of a new program for autism spectrum children. The free meal service has been very well-received, distributing approximately 170 breakfasts and 350 lunches per day. The program has resulted in the need for additional staffing and an increase in hours to distribute the meals. The BOE is investigating the possibility of offering a cost of living raise to help with the hiring process and maintain their current cafeteria staffing.

The recent storms revealed two new leaks in the roof and are in the process of being repaired. Mystic Air Quality has been contacted to ensure that a mold issue has not developed.

B. EMERGENCY SERVICES & SAFETY

First Selectman Chmielewski shared that Emergency Services Director Mike Bednarz and the Chiefs and Deputy Chiefs from both Fire Companies continue to meet and work well together. He commended the team and reported that he has had positive communications with Gardner Lake Volunteer Fire Company's Board of Directors President Cheryl Philopena and Treasurer Christine Lindo and other staff officers.

Emergency Services Administrator and Manager Bednarz congratulated the newly-elected Board Members. He provided a brief explanation of his position to act as a designee on behalf of the First Selectman to administratively supervise the town's career and part-time Firefighter/EMTs. The position was initiated, in part, to address a labor law that was brought to the town's attention. The labor law led to the difficult decision of whether the town should continue to utilize volunteers or hire paid Firefighter/EMTs. In past years, the town has been very fortunate to hire exceptional personnel who were trained within the town's volunteer fire company system and had an intimate knowledge of the town.

Unfortunately, this is no longer the case.

Since his appointment, they have sought to improve and enhance the communication between the town's two fire companies and between the town and the fire companies by holding monthly Emergency Services meetings between the Chiefs and Deputy Chiefs of the Salem and Gardner Lake Volunteer Fire Companies, then-Selectman Liaison Chmielewski, and himself. Initial discussions included the need to hire additional staffing as they grappled with the nationwide shortage of First Responders. Based on their collective input regarding the requirements and town's needs, current full-time career Firefighter/EMT Ryan Teixeira and former part-time Firefighter/EMT Rick Martin were instrumental in developing, establishing, and implementing a hiring procedure and training program. Firefighter/EMT Martin's talents and abilities have since been called upon to assist him

with additional duties. As a result of these conversations and developments, the town was able to hire full-time career Firefighter/EMT Travis Roberts and the town held its first Badge Pinning Ceremony for its two career Firefighter/EMTs in October 2021.

Following discussions regarding the operational considerations for the types of vehicles that would be required for certain events, an Operational Response Guide was developed. The Guide is now included as part of their training program and is a working document that may be updated and revised, as necessary.

Last month, a joint cooperative State-certified Aerial Apparatus Operators Class that also included the towns of Montville and East Lyme was offered to the members of both Fire Companies. The class, taught by the CT Fire Academy, provided advanced knowledge and hands-on training of the tactical operation of Salem's 121 Ladder Truck and completes Firefighter/EMT Roberts' training in all 14 of the emergency service vehicles. In-service continual training for all of the Firefighter/EMTs on all of the vehicles will continue to be conducted to maintain proficiency.

Resident State Troopers Report

Emergency Services Administrator and Manager Bednarz also presented the Resident State Trooper report. The Town of Salem has two Resident State Troopers, Trooper First Class Ben Duffy and Trooper Kevin Crosby. In addition to their regular duties, the Troopers engage in old-fashioned community policing, visiting and assisting the Salem School staff and administration by participating in safety meetings, providing traffic safety, and facilitating and participating in safety training drills; attending Salem Seniors meetings; providing traffic safety for town events, and; visiting local businesses. These activities help them maintain a high level of visibility thereby enhancing the town's public safety. They also assist the town's staff by participating in their safety meetings, providing added election day security, and hosting the Drug Take-Back Program. After receiving numerous complaints regarding speeding vehicles, they took the initiative to research, recommend, and install speed safety signs throughout the town. The Troopers have also been issued town fire department and EMS communication pagers allowing them to decrease the response time to non-police calls and enhance public safety. They invite the residents to participate in their Annual Holiday Toy Drive at the Salem Marketplace on December 11 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. He asked the Board to join him in expressing their gratitude for their service and maintaining the safety of the town and its residents.

First Selectman Chmielewski announced that they are working on getting the Troopers enrolled in the D.A.R.E. class.

Board Member Griggs added that monetary (in lieu of a toy(s)) donations for the Holiday Toy Drive may be dropped off at the State Police Barracks. The donations should indicate that the donation is for Salem. Clerk Collins also commended the Troopers, adding that he recently received a speeding ticket on Music Vale Road.

The Board Members thanked Emergency Services Administrator and Manager Bednarz for his report.

C. BOE DATA REQUEST

Board Member Bernier reported that he submitted the data requested by the BOE and has received an acknowledgment of receipt from BOE Chairman Reith. He was unable to gather solid numbers for the shared services and a note was indicated as such. Clerk Collins commended Board Member Bernier on gathering and submitting the information and expressed his hopes that the information will prove useful to the BOE. Chairman Dickson thanked Board Members Bernier, Casciano, and Griggs for gathering, compiling, and submitting the information.

10. CAPITAL PLAN DISCUSSION

a. Send letter to all Departments to review their Capital item requests and submit the requests with documentation before the December Board of Finance Meeting

Chairman Dickson reported that the Capital Plan requests have been received and will be discussed with the various departments beginning in January 2022. He recommended the Board Members review their requests and prepare any questions they might have. It was noted that some of the items might qualify for funding through the ARPA.

Board Member Bourgeois proposed the possibility of generating a summary spreadsheet that includes all of the Capital requests of this and the previous years for comparison purposes. She also requested a document noting the allocated amount vs. the actual amount. Board Member Cadwell stated that the BOE's requests include proposals and quotes that are very helpful and suggested the possibility of requesting that the other departments do the same. Chairman Dickson agreed that the more information that is provided, the more helpful it is. A summary spreadsheet will be provided to the Board. Any questions they might have may be forwarded to the Chairman who will forward the questions to the various department heads before the meeting.

Chairman Dickson explained the budget process to the newly-elected/appointed members and the past and current challenges that they will need to consider. Clerk Collins expanded on the challenges and effects of revaluation and redistricting.

11. FORMAT & PLANNING DISCUSSION FOR LETTER TO DEPARTMENTS REGARDING BUDGETARY EXPECTATIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR 2022/23, INCLUDES DISCUSSION ON ISSUES & CONCERNS FOR THE UPCOMING BUDGET SEASON.

Chairman Dickson stated that a letter to the departments has been drafted and discussed the volatility of the time period that will affect their budget. Board Member Bourgeois requested that all of the departments carefully review their budget, search for any synergies, and economies of scale across the town. Board Member Bernier discussed the opportunities and

challenges of their FY2022/23 budget, including the impact of revaluation and the resulting changes in the Grand List, both in terms of residential and commercial properties; energy costs, including fuel and utility costs; inflation impacts and supply chain issues for goods and services; impact to emergency services based on the shift of responsibilities and increases in training requirements and regulations, and; the receipt of ARPA Funds. Unknowns include the ECS (Education Cost Sharing) Funding, school enrollment numbers, and SPED (Special Education). The management of these items in a well-organized and cost-effective manner will be important. Board Member Rucci agreed with the supply chain issues and the importance of planning ahead and preparing for their future needs. Board Member Bourgeois reiterated her request, emphasizing their fiduciary responsibilities and the importance of working together as a community to create a solid budget that is cognizant of all of the town's citizens. Clerk Collins expressed his confidence in all of the departments to present a lean and realistic budget and stated that the purpose of the town's Unassigned Fund Balance (aka Rainy-Day Fund) is to accommodate for any unexpected expenses. He also added the importance of remaining cognizant of the town's families in need. Board Member Bernier reiterated that the town's Fund Balance Policy states that their goal is to maintain an 18% Unassigned Fund Balance. The funds have been heavily used the last two budget seasons to reduce the Unassigned Fund Balance on one-time expenses to help maintain the mil rate. The town's Unassigned Fund Balance is now at approximately 18%. The town's Bond Rating is now excellent as a result of many factors, including the drafting and adoption of the Fund Balance Policy, maintaining their Unassigned Fund Balance at an acceptable level, and their fiscal responsibility.

Clerk Collins requested that Board Members Cadwell and Griggs receive an update from the BOE regarding how they have used or plan to use their ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) and ARPA Funds.

OLD BUSINESS

Clerk Collins reported that he attended a recent in-person Planning & Zoning Commission meeting and recalled that a motion was unanimously passed to recite the Pledge of Allegiance at the beginning of their meetings. He proposed the Board include the item on future agendas for their live in-person meetings.

Chairman Dickson reminded the Board that various select departments will be presenting their Capital requests, some of which could utilize their ARPA funds.

ADJOURNMENT

M/S/C: Collins/Bourgeois, to adjourn the meeting at 9:04 p.m. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted by: Agnes T. Miyuki, Recording Secretary for the Town of Salem